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**Jesuit Spirituality**  
from a  
**Process Perspective**



**Joseph A. Bracken, S.J.**

**Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits**  
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# Jesuit Spirituality from a Process Perspective

## INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

The final test of any philosophy or theology is whether or not it makes sense in terms of the reader's experience, enriches his or her life. For many years now, I have reflected on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in connection with the process-relational philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Out of this joint study has come by degrees a conviction which has profoundly changed the way in which I understand my Christian faith, has even changed the way in which I pray and look for divine guidance in my daily life. In brief, I have come to the conclusion that our human world—indeed, the entire created universe—is contained within and structured by the communitarian life of the three divine persons. More and more, I find that the whole meaning and purpose of human life is to be one with the "Son" in the "Son's" ongoing response to the "Father" through the energizing activity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> Even inanimate creation, as I see it, shares in this communitarian life of the three divine persons, so that, as Ephesians 1:10 proclaims, we should give glory to the Father that everything in heaven and on earth is even now recapitulated in Christ, His Son, through the power of the Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> The names "Father" and "Son" are written with quotation marks in this first paragraph in order to indicate their purely metaphorical, nonsexist character. For the purposes of easy reading, however, these same terms will be used without quotation marks in the rest of the essay.

Some years ago, I published my reflections on these and other related themes in a book entitled *The Triune Symbol*.<sup>2</sup> But friends quickly pointed out to me that, while the book had significant implications for pastoral theology and spiritual direction, it was still too technical for most people to read and readily apply to their own lives. Hence, its value for pastoral theology and spiritual direction was very limited. What was needed was another book which would articulate the same vision of the God/world relationship in common-sense language. For various reasons, I have never written that second book.

Then "Foundational Issues in Jesuit Spirituality" appeared in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*,<sup>3</sup> and I found myself wondering whether I should write a companion piece in terms of my own neo-Whiteheadian synthesis of theology. For, while I was (and am) quite sympathetic to the basic thrust of the thought of the author of that article, I was still somewhat uneasy with the results. Too much of classic Ignatian spirituality, as I saw it, was sacrificed in favor of an action-oriented, pragmatic, perhaps even somewhat-rationalistic approach to the spiritual life. Furthermore, I felt that my own scheme, while preserving the social and dynamic context so commendable in that earlier presentation, would still provide for features of traditional Ignatian spirituality which seem to be undercut by the latter's proposal. In brief, it seemed like an excellent opportunity to make from a process perspective a summary presentation of that theme of the communitarian life of the three divine persons and of material related to it, and to make clear the relevance of those concepts to the spiritual life, specifically, to the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola.

In the following pages, accordingly, I will first offer a preliminary sketch of the God/world relationship and various other themes

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., *The Triune Symbol: Persons, Process and Community* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Roger Haight, S.J., "Foundational Issues in Jesuit Spirituality," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 19/4 (September 1987).

### *For your information . . .*

The Jesuit university in El Salvador will soon number among its faculty two authors of essays in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, Charles Beirne and Dean Brackley. They will go there as part of a team of members of the Society of Jesus from several lands who will take up the academic teaching and research and the public witness to the Gospel which their six murdered brethren had carried on so faithfully until last November. Father Beirne, presently academic vice-president at Santa Clara University, wrote "Compass and Catalyst: The Ministry of Administration" for the March 1986 issue of *Studies*. The article by Father Brackley, who teaches theology at Fordham University in New York, appeared as "Downward Mobility: Social Implications of Saint Ignatius's Two Standards" in the January 1988 issue. Please join your best wishes and prayers to those of the members of the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality for these two men, for their newly appointed companions, and for the veteran, ongoing members of that university who precisely in and through that intellectual apostolate have given so much of themselves to the service of faith and the promotion of justice.

The ideas of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), mathematician and philosopher, form the framework of the essay in this present issue of *Studies*. Whitehead was a man of immense abilities, wide-ranging accomplishments, a deep interest in religion, and a talent for putting many of his insights into a vivid, imaginative, indeed, a poetic prose. Consider, for example, from four of his works, these brief selections on religion, on God, on Christ, and on Christianity.

Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest. (*Science and the Modern World*)

The . . . love of God for the world . . . is the particular providence for particular occasions. What is done in the world is transformed into a

reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. By reason of this reciprocal relation, the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world. In this sense, God is the great companion—the fellow sufferer who understands. (*Process and Reality*)

The life of Christ is not an exhibition of overruling power. Its glory is for those who can discern it, and not for the world. Its power lies in its absence of force. It has the decisiveness of a supreme ideal, and that is why the history of the world divides at this point of time. (*Religion in the Making*)

The essence of Christianity is the appeal to the life of Christ as a revelation of the nature of God and of his agency in the world. (*Adventures of Ideas*)

But Whitehead was first and foremost a great philosopher. Joseph Bracken, professor of theology at Xavier University in Cincinnati and author of this issue of *Studies*, has paid him the best possible tribute by taking with ultimate seriousness Whitehead's process-relational philosophy on its own merits and then going on to elaborate a neo-Whiteheadian synthesis of theology. Certain central elements of that synthesis and their relevance to Jesuit spirituality make up this article. And if some of the elements of that synthesis seem startlingly new, it might be good to recall from *Science and the Modern World* another remark by Whitehead: "A clash of doctrines is not a disaster, it is an opportunity."

The one-hundredth issue of *Studies* (November 1989), "Jesuits Praying," has brought inquiries about and requests for extra copies from readers who would like to make them available to others. We have such copies here at the Seminar office. The price for back issues is \$1.50 per copy plus postage. Just send a note and we shall be glad to get such copies to you right away or to those whose names and addresses you give us.

This is the time of year that the United States Jesuit provincials invite new members to join the Seminar in the fall as several present members then complete their three-year terms. By the next issue of *Studies* in May, I shall be able to give you the names of those members-to-be.

*John W. Padberg, S.J.*  
*Editor*

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developed at greater length in *The Triune Symbol*. Then I will address myself to the six features of the Spiritual Exercises which "Fundamental Issues" sought to reinterpret and indicate how they can be differently understood within the framework of this process synthesis. My intention here will not be to refute the positions advanced in that earlier article, since the approach there has strong appeal for many Jesuits. Rather, my plan is simply to offer an alternative vision for those who, like me, want a more synthetic or visionary approach to the God/world relationship. Finally, in the third and last part of the article, I will take up some of the more specific issues involved in understanding the philosophy of Whitehead. Readers who would be uncomfortable and/or impatient with this more academic discussion may choose to terminate their reading of the article at the end of Section 3. The essentials of what I want to communicate will already have been laid out by that point, and what follows in Section 4 will be geared to those of a more theoretical bent. It will deal, for example, with the meaning of the term "actual occasion" or "actual entity," the nature of "societies" as the aggregates into which actual occasions combine, and the overall worldview which thereby results. Likewise, I will briefly indicate why I believe that an event-ontology such as Whitehead proposes might well be a catalyst for further progress in Roman Catholic systematic theology.

### A NEO-WHITEHEADIAN WORLDVIEW

Before going any further, let me remind the reader that this communitarian model for the God/world relationship is only a model of reality, not a picture of it. That is, it is merely "a symbolic representation of aspects of the world which are not directly accessible to

us.”<sup>4</sup> What the model attempts to describe is ultimately a mystery; but the mystery (here, the God/world relationship) may perhaps be illuminated by carefully thinking through the logical presuppositions and consequences of a given model. Hence, the model should be taken seriously, but not literally.<sup>5</sup> For if taken literally the model tends to distort rather than illuminate the reality in question. The “planetary” model of the atom, for example, has been very useful in trying to visualize these minuscule components of reality. But the quantum theory has made evident its limitations as a model for understanding this level of reality. Hence, physicists are experimenting with other models to explain what is still inaccessible to human observation even with the aid of scientific technology. Similarly, the model which I will set forth in the next few pages will illuminate some, but not all, of the features of the traditional God/world relationship. Other models may be necessary to explain these other features, and the exact correlation of these models with one another may always remain a mystery.

### The Trinity and Created Reality

Given these preliminary remarks, let me now try to sketch a Christian worldview based on the notion of the Trinity as a community of three divine persons in dynamic interrelation. That is, quite apart from any relation to creation, there is an unending exchange of life and love between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The unchanging pattern of their interrelation may be briefly described as follows. The Father at every instant (for reasons to be explained in Section D) decides to offer the divine Son a possibility for their joint existence as one God. The Son simultaneously decides to accept this possibility from the Father, thereby converting it into actuality for all three of them. The Holy Spirit, finally, at that same moment decides to prompt the Father to offer and the Son to respond so as to

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<sup>4</sup> Ian Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 47f.

perpetuate their coexistence as a divine community. The divine Spirit thus mediates between the Father and the Son somewhat as the "soul" or animating principle within each of us is said to mediate between the mind and the body, keeping them in an ongoing interrelation.

Complex as this arrangement might seem at first glance, it nevertheless guarantees that each of the divine persons plays an indispensable role in their life together as the divine community. The Father cannot actualize the possibilities which the Father offers to the Son. The Son, on the other hand, only actualizes at any given moment what the Father proposes by way of possibility for their joint existence. Finally, the Holy Spirit continually mediates between the Father and the Son but is bound by the outcome of their interaction. All three are needed to sustain their common life; hence, their unity with one another is strictly indissoluble. Furthermore, as I shall indicate below, this rhythm or flow of life that is then established between the three persons is the ontological basis for the incorporation of finite subjects of experience into the divine communitarian life.

In line with the Nicene Creed, which describes the Father as Creator of heaven and earth, let me now further propose that the Father communicates at every moment to all these creaturely subjects of experience (both human and subhuman) a similar possibility of existence. That is, the Father communicates an impulse of life and love which empowers each of them both to be itself and to decide to exist in union with the Son in the Son's response to the Father. These decisions, of course, are for the most part not consciously made. Only rational beings make conscious decisions with varying degrees of self-awareness. But, in line with the Whiteheadian metaphysics which I will explain in the last section of this essay, I here stipulate that all finite subjects of experience, even the subatomic components of inanimate objects, make an implicit feeling-level "decision" at every moment simply to be themselves. That is, they unconsciously "cut off" (in Latin, *de-cido*) other possibilities of existence in order to be precisely this entity at this moment in this space and time.

Furthermore, in and through its self-constituting decision each finite entity is thereby linked with all its contemporaries in assenting to the Father's proposal of existence and thus in joining its limited "yes" to the Son's unconditional "yes" to the Father's offer of life and love for that moment. The Holy Spirit, meanwhile, is active within creation to inspire each new generation of finite subjects of experience to assent to the Father's proposal of existence and thus to join their collective "yes" to the unconditional "yes" of the Son to the Father. The net effect, then, is that the world of creation is focused at every moment on the divine Son in the latter's relationship to the Father through the power of the Spirit. Creation exists within God and shares in the trinitarian life of God.

What happens, you may ask, if a given entity says "no" to the Father's proposal of existence? It would by that very fact cease to be. In other words, simply to be, a finite subject of experience must somehow respond to the Father's offer of life and love. But the degree to which it thus responds, above all in terms of the direction which it implicitly chooses for its self-constitution, may vary from one entity to another. Here, in effect, is the process-oriented explanation of the problem of evil. Not just human beings in their temporal consciousness, but all finite subjects of experience possess a measure of spontaneity, an innate ability, that is, to deviate from what the Father has in mind for them at this moment of world history. In so deciding, they effectively bring disorder and chaos into creation. Not all chaos, to be sure, is destructive; sometimes chaos is paradoxically the necessary preliminary to the emergence of higher forms of order.<sup>6</sup> But by definition this type of chaos which results from the decision of a finite subject of experience to deviate from the divine purpose for it is destructive. The Father, of course, continually adjusts the divine offer of possibilities to new generations of finite subjects of experience so as to meet the situation already created by the decisions of preceding generations. But

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984).

over a period of time something like a collective power of evil is created as the decisions of many successive generations of finite subjects of experience are added to one another to produce greater and greater disorder in the world of creation.

### **The Incarnation of the Son**

The scene is thus set for the Incarnation, the presence and activity of the Son within the world of creation in such a way as to mobilize a collective power of good in response to the collective power of evil. That is, what finite (above all, human) decisions have generated by way of a collective power of evil or disorder within creation must be countered by a rival power for good, focused on a more adequate individual and corporate response to the Father's offer of life and love to all creatures. For the vision embodied in the divine "initial aims," as Whitehead calls them, is the only basis for true and lasting order within the universe. But, before giving attention to how this process of restoring peace and harmony to the world of creation works, one must first offer a prior explanation of how Jesus is the incarnate Son of God and, secondly, of how his words and deeds continue to affect men and women up to the present moment.

Theologians have long recognized that, in principle, divine grace should not coerce the human mind and will, but rather should empower human beings to function more naturally, in a more genuinely human way. Yet a fully satisfactory explanation of how this is so has always been lacking in those theologies which conceived grace primarily in terms of divine efficient causality. For what God makes to be, has to be; otherwise, God is not omnipotent. Within the process-oriented view of reality we sketched above, however, this speculative difficulty is no longer present. For the Father offers only possibilities of existence to creatures, just as the Father offers a new possibility of existence to the Son at every moment. Like the Son, the creature must respond in some fashion simply to exist. But the degree of responsiveness is the creature's decision; the creature, in other words, is free to respond in its own

way to the divine offer of life and love. Yet the more it responds positively and wholeheartedly, the more it approximates the unconditional (even though completely free) response of the Son.

Applying this reasoning to Jesus, one readily sees how he can be both divine and human at the same time. In his human nature, Jesus never seriously deviated from what the Father had in mind for him at every moment of his life. Granted that he presumably felt the normal stresses and frustrations of growing up, Jesus in his adult life came to recognize and submit to the inner promptings of his Father in heaven; this is what Christians have traditionally meant by the sinlessness of Jesus. So behaving, he perfectly synchronized his human "yes" to the Father with the "yes" he made to the Father as the eternal Son of God. The Son was thus working in and through Jesus as a free, but still perfectly compliant, instrument. Moreover, far from feeling constrained by his obedience to what he recognized as the will of the Father, Jesus undoubtedly experienced a greater freedom of thought and action than other human beings. For the rest of us are uneasily aware of a sinful past in which we have more or less consciously said "no" to what the Father seemed to be asking of us. Hence, we are burdened with feelings of guilt and alienation from the Father and our fellow human beings, which make genuinely free and peaceful decisions on our part more difficult. Jesus, on the other hand, had a truly filial relationship with the Father which unquestionably gave him greater peace of mind and self-assurance. He too, of course, was tested in that self-confidence, as the traumatic events in the last hours of his earthly life testify. But even then he seems to have weathered the storm and died in peace.

Here one might object that in terms of this hypothesis not only Jesus but many other saintly individuals might be the incarnate Son of God. That is, in virtue of a lifetime of unswerving fidelity to the voice of conscience, they too would be conscious or unconscious instruments of the divine Son in the latter's ongoing response to the Father. Up to a point this is certainly true. As noted above, the collective power of good in this world at any given moment is constituted by the decisions of all the finite subjects of experience inso-

far as they are linked with the response of the Son to the Father at that same moment. Thus the Son is indeed working through the saintly founders of other world religions and their adherents as well as through the followers of Jesus in promoting the Kingdom of God on earth. But, from another perspective, Jesus was still unique among those who have said "yes" to the Father over the centuries. For Jesus was the incarnate Son of God, not simply because he responded to the Father's inspirations so faithfully all through his adult life, but also because he was given a very special mission by the Father in terms of those promptings. He was asked to be the Savior of the world, the implicit focal point for the strivings of human beings everywhere to live in accord with their consciences. Admittedly, this is a specifically Christian belief which might well be contested by Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and so forth. But, at least in principle, there is no theoretical reason why Jesus cannot be regarded in a special way as the incarnate Son of God because of the Father's plan for the salvation of the world.

### **The Church**

In any event, from the perspective of Ignatian spirituality, the key point is that Christians as followers of Jesus are called to imitate the pattern of his earthly life, namely, like him to respond to the inner promptings of the Father and thus to become one with the divine Son in combatting the collective power of evil and in consolidating the collective power of good in this world. Accordingly, let me turn now to a brief consideration of the Church and its role in this ongoing process of redemption. The Church, after all, is not synonymous with the Kingdom of God, for the latter includes all of creation insofar as it is joined to the Son in the Son's ongoing relationship to the Father. The Church, on the other hand, is the association of those individuals to whom the Father's plan for the salvation of the world has been most fully revealed. Christians alone profess belief in God as triune, and Christians alone believe that Jesus of Nazareth is in a special sense the incarnate Son of God. Hence, they bear

a special responsibility for carrying on the work of Jesus not simply as individuals but as members of a community called the Church.

Here it is necessary to summarize what is explained in greater detail in the last section of the essay, namely, Whitehead's doctrine of "societies," understood as groupings of finite subjects of experience according to relatively fixed patterns of behavior. Since, according to Whitehead, new subjects of experience are constantly coming into existence, what preserves continuity from moment to moment or what gives each society an ongoing self-identity is the continuous pattern of interrelation among the members of the society. Thus the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God because they preserve a constant and unchanging pattern of interrelation from moment to moment. An atom remains an atom because its component parts, which are likewise momentary subjects of experience, retain an ongoing pattern of interrelation. So, too, with physical organisms and, indeed, entire communities; what guarantees ongoing corporate self-identity in each case is the pattern of interrelation among the component parts or members.

Transposed now to the Church as the community of the followers of Jesus in space and time, this interpretation views Christians as held together and given an identifiable group identity by the way in which each and all of them internalize the pattern of Jesus' life, think and act as Jesus did, that is, and respond to the inner promptings of the Father as Jesus did. Naturally, the urgings of the Father may not be the same to all individuals and to all groups; nor, presumably, will their individual and collective response to the Father's promptings always be the same. But for an individual to call himself or herself Christian and for a group to call itself Christian, an unmistakable link with the person and message of Jesus must be visibly operative within the behavior of that person or that group.

Paradoxically, however, the desire for total conformity in thought and action among the members of the Church can be counterproductive for its deeper mission, the promotion of the Kingdom of God. Such a desire may, in other words, represent rigidity rather than creativity in responding to the Father's impulses at this mo-



ment in history. In any case, Church leaders above all must exercise caution to avoid uncritically identifying certain preconceived needs of the Church as an ongoing institution with the demands of the Gospel message. As noted above, the Church is not synonymous with the Kingdom but only a divinely chosen instrument for its realization. Communities as well as individuals, in other words, can "sin," can deviate from the aim which the Father has for them within the overall plan of salvation, when their members become preoccupied with their own corporate survival and well-being and neglect the evident pastoral needs of people both within and outside the institutional Church. The history of Christianity is filled with examples of such shortsightedness. Different church groups have quarreled with one another about rival prerogatives for preaching the Gospel message. Likewise, within given groups, church leaders have acted high-handedly and lay members have acted irresponsibly in the face of controversial issues in the matter of faith and morals.

Clearly, what is needed is a new awareness that all without exception should be governed by the inner promptings of the Father, who alone sees what is or can be truly effective for the promotion of the Kingdom. Naturally, this implies that members of the Church must spend more time in prayer, listening for what the Father may wish to communicate to them, and less time in pursuing goals and values simply of their own choosing. For, only if members of the Church deliberately take this more worshipful stance, are they likely to conform their lives to the pattern of Jesus' life and thus to act as his "ambassadors" in the promotion of the Kingdom.

### **Salvation**

Finally, some mention should be made of what constitutes salvation within this processive-communitarian scheme. The Kingdom of God, it will be remembered, is a moment-by-moment achievement in that at every moment the divine Son, together with all finite subjects of experience, responds in the power of the Holy Spirit to the Father's offer of life and love for that moment. The collective "yes" thus

spoken to the Father from the Son and all finite entities constitutes the Kingdom of God for that moment in cosmic history. In the next moment, the Father under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit offers a new set of possibilities to the Son and all subsequent subjects of experience. This new response to the Father's proposal will constitute still another momentary realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. Seen from this perspective, the salvation both of the individual human being and of all creation is a moment-by-moment achievement.

Yet these moments of salvation, once they occur, do not thereby perish. They become part of the ongoing life of the triune God. The three divine persons, in other words, are continually adding new creaturely experiences to their own communitarian life. Furthermore, being thus part of the divine life, these experiences are transformed; that is, they can be appreciated in a new way for the modest role which each of them played in the unfolding of the world process. Applied to human beings, this means that every moment of our earthly lives together with all its attendant circumstances is preserved, albeit in a transformed state, within the communitarian life of the three divine persons. At the end of our lives, when this series of earthly moments is complete, we experience "resurrection"; that is, we are reunited with all those past moments of our life in such a way that we no longer experience them serially (as in our earthly life) but simultaneously, as a unified whole. For the first time in our lives, we are fully alive, fully in touch with ourselves as unique human beings.

Yet, precisely at this moment of "resurrection," we likewise experience a strong sense of judgment. For the first time in our entire life, we see the full truth about ourselves and the world in which we lived. The decision which we then have to make is simple and yet momentous: Do we accept ourselves as we really are and thus enter into the fullness of the divine life, or do we refuse to accept the truth about ourselves and suffer the consequences? Before discussing these consequences, let me emphasize that the judgment which is thus made is not God's judgment on us so much as our own judgment on ourselves. The three divine persons, after all,

have already accepted us and incorporated our lives into the divine communitarian life. All that they do (and, indeed, must do in order to incorporate us into the fullness of their communitarian life) is to present us with the complete truth about ourselves and the role which we played in the world process. We have to decide whether or not to "accept acceptance."<sup>7</sup>

If we do not, then various consequences might follow. First of all, we might thus condemn ourselves to "hell," i.e., a state of permanent resistance to participation in the cosmic society of which we are nevertheless members. Second, we might be exposed to a greater or longer period of reflection on the meaning and significance of our lives, before becoming reconciled to the truth about ourselves and thus attaining full participation in the divine life. This would be equivalent to the classical notion of purgatory, minus the factor of physical punishment for the effects of one's sins on earth. Likewise, it would indirectly justify praying for the souls in purgatory, since one's prayers would presumably help these individuals better to accept themselves as flawed but still lovable human beings. Finally, it might be the case that the three divine persons would allow such individuals equivalently to try again through reincarnation either in life on this earth or somewhere else in the universe. (As Karl Rahner comments in *Foundations of Christian Faith*, the notion of a second chance or, indeed, multiple chances, which is so common among the religions of the East, might be admitted as a possibility, provided that "this reincarnation is not understood as a fate for man which will never end and will continue on forever in time."<sup>8</sup> In that case, of course, the individual would still be required to accept the truth about both lives (or a whole series of

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<sup>7</sup> In this connection see Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 3:223-28; also by the same author, *The New Being* (New York: Scribner's, 1955), 3-14, and *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 163-67.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 442.

lives together). For, in the end, salvation is a matter of truthful self-acceptance.

Implicit here, of course, is the idea that sin is based on deception—deception of others, but above all self-deception. For, when an individual has decided to ignore what seems to be the persistent promptings of the Father on a certain point, one has to justify that contrary decision. After all, no one willingly chooses what is to her or his harm. Hence, one must rationalize or justify one's decision to others, but above all to oneself. Furthermore, the longer this type of (self-)deception is carried on, the more difficult it is to see the real truth of the matter. One comes to believe in one's own lies, even to forget that they are indeed lies. Hence, when at the end of one's life one is obliged to face the unvarnished truth about one's past life, he or she can find full self-acceptance extremely difficult, almost impossible. Were it not for the concomitant awareness that paradoxically one is already accepted by the three divine persons as the person that one really is, and that one's life has been somehow worked into the overall plan for the redemption of the world, it would be impossible. But, given the miracle of God's grace, one can come to terms with one's past and accept full incorporation into the divine life.

## APPLICATION TO THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

This completes my overview of the process-oriented systematic theology which I set forth initially in *The Triune Symbol* and have continued to reflect upon and refine in the intervening years. At this point, I would like to turn to the "problem areas" in the Spiritual Exercises to which the *Studies* essay "Foundational Issues in Jesuit Spirituality" made reference and indicate both where I agree with what is said there and where I differ with it in the matter of an "update."

### **First Principle and Foundation**

First of all, with reference to the First Principle and Foundation, I would agree that at face value Ignatius's reflections are too individualistic and eschatological for most action-oriented contemporary Christians. As that essay says,

The first principle and foundation today should include some statement concerning human responsibility to this world and the eternal value of human action in this world and for this world. The first principle and foundation ought to illuminate how human action in this world even now is saved, and that the exercise of my freedom and the creativity of my action count.<sup>9</sup>

But, given the process-oriented understanding of the God/world relationship which I elaborated above, it should be possible to preserve both Ignatius's original intent and such a new focus on Christian life in this world.

For, as noted above, salvation is literally achieved at every moment within the cosmic society constituted by the three divine persons and all finite subjects of experience. That is, at every moment the Son together with all existing finite subjects of experience responds to the offer of life and love extended to them by the Father in the power of the Spirit. Such an action on the part of the finite subjects of experience is both an act of worship to the Father as the originating principle within the divine community and the only way in which those same entities can effectively constitute the world in which we live here and now. Thus, worship of God and service of one's fellow creatures are conjoined in one and the same decision to join with the Son in the Son's ongoing response to the Father. Furthermore, each moment in this history of the God/world relationship is not isolated but is joined to its predecessors from time immemorial, so as to constitute the ongoing "hymn of the uni-

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<sup>9</sup> "Foundational Issues," 24.

verse," to borrow a phrase from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the decisions made by innumerable subjects of experience at every moment contribute to the building of the Kingdom of God not only here and now in time but likewise in eternity. For in eternity all past moments are preserved in their simultaneity, even as with each new moment in time a further increment is made to the transtemporal reality of the Kingdom of God.

Admittedly, many of these finite decisions are disordered and will have to be remedied by the decisions of still other finite subjects of experience in the future. I will have more to say about that shortly when I discuss the reality of sin in terms of this processive-communitarian scheme. But for now I only wish to emphasize that Ignatius was certainly not wrong in urging the retreatant at the beginning of the Exercises to ponder that "man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul."<sup>11</sup> In the end, this is all that any finite subject of experience can do in terms of its self-constituting decision: join with the Son in building the Kingdom of God for this moment through response to the life-giving offer of the Father in the power of the Spirit. Concomitantly, of course, it is joining with its contemporaries to constitute the world of the present moment. But this world, as Whitehead comments, is "perpetually perishing."<sup>12</sup> Its only enduring value is its contribution to the fullness of the Kingdom of God, the ongoing communitarian life of the three divine persons together with all their creatures, which alone survives and thus serves as the ever-present context for the decisions of creatures here and now. We live, in other words, simultaneously in two worlds: consciously in

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<sup>10</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe* (New York: Harper & Row Perennial Library, 1972).

<sup>11</sup> Louis J. Puhl, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1951), 12.

<sup>12</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 338 (514). N.B.: The number in parentheses refers to the corresponding page in the 1927 original edition of *Process and Reality*, also from Macmillan.

the world of space and time, unconsciously in the world of eternity to which the world of space and time implicitly belongs. Our efforts to promote the Kingdom of God should reflect our awareness of belonging to both worlds.

Another concern of the earlier essay is that Ignatius's wording of the First Principle and Foundation is too individualistic, with the explicit focus on "man" as an individual human being. Here, too, I fully agree but would add that even a concentration on "man" in the collective is still too narrow. What is at stake here is the union of all finite subjects of experience, even the subatomic components of inanimate objects, such as tables and chairs, with the Son in the latter's response to the Father through the power of the Spirit. Classical Buddhism speaks of *Śūnyatā* as the mystical experience of the "dependent co-origination" of all entities upon one another from moment to moment.<sup>13</sup> It is quite possibly this same experience, albeit reinterpreted as the experience of a cosmic society of existents headed by the three divine persons, to which I am making appeal here. The three divine persons, in other words, exist in "dependent co-origination" on one another and on all their creatures from moment to moment. Likewise, all finite subjects of experience exist in "dependent co-origination" on one another and on the three divine persons at every moment. The cosmic society which thus exists from moment to moment is the necessary by-product of the interrelated agencies of all its constituent members.

In a practical way, this would mean that the First Principle and Foundation ought to be partially reworded somewhat as follows:

All finite subjects of experience are created to praise, reverence, and serve the three divine persons, and by this means to attain salvation.

All creatures on the face of the earth are created for one another to help each other in attaining the end for which they are all created.

The point here is not a sentimental rhapsodizing about one's bond-  
edness with the universe, but a pragmatic recognition of the essen-

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1980), 7f, 269-75.

tial dependence of all subjects of experience upon one another to constitute a world from moment to moment. The implicit anthropocentrism of much of Western spirituality (including the First Principle and Foundation of the Ignatian Exercises) needs to be complemented by the wisdom of the East, provided that that wisdom can be represented within a Christian and, in this case, explicitly trinitarian context.

### **Sin in the First Week**

I turn now to the second "problem area" of the Exercises, namely, the meditations on sin of the First Week. Quite rightly, in my judgment, that earlier essay on foundational issues calls attention to the need for a deeper awareness of sinful social structures which immobilize otherwise well-intentioned individuals, preventing them from doing something about the blatant injustices which they see all around them in contemporary society.<sup>14</sup> Yet, as I see it, this insensitivity to issues of social justice is grounded in self-deception, what I described above as the long-term effect on oneself of one's disordered decisions. Hence, there is still a place within the framework of the Exercises for one prayerfully to look at the patterns of thought and action which have taken shape in one's own personal life in recent months and years (or at least since the time of one's last retreat) and to ask for divine guidance in discerning which among those patterns are based on self-deception, a more or less conscious refusal on one's part to look at the facts, the full truth of the matter.

Certainly, the recommendation is in order that we "meditate on the dehumanizing effects of the social patterns of our corporate action on concrete groups of people."<sup>15</sup> But, in my judgment, much of this "objective analysis" of our contemporary social context should be done either before or after the retreat, not within the retreat itself. For within the retreat one's conversation is primarily

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<sup>14</sup> "Foundational Issues," 25-28.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.



with the Lord who, better than oneself or any expert on social justice, knows precisely what one can and should do to remedy the situation at hand.

This is not to imply that there is one (and only one) solution to the problems which one faces and that one must pray until that solution is revealed to oneself by the Lord in some mystical experience. Nor does it imply that one's prayer, as far as possible, should be divorced from one's work. My point is simply that our work is done primarily for the Lord to promote the Kingdom of God. Hence, we should have the humility to allow ourselves to be led by the Lord, above all in times of retreat. Naturally, this also calls for a more careful use of the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits, a point to which I shall return shortly. For the moment, I only wish to point out that our best safeguard against self-deception is not, in the first place, human reasoning, however conscientiously it may be carried out, but rather "listening" for the inspirations of the Spirit or, from another perspective, the persistent promptings of the Father in our regard. In effect, this means setting aside our own agenda during prayer periods and allowing ourselves to be surprised.

### **The Kingdom of Christ**

Still another "problem area" in the Exercises, according to the earlier essay, is the Kingdom meditation as originally formulated by Ignatius. It finds the focus on Christ as King out of step with current New Testament scholarship on the self-awareness of Jesus and with the presuppositions for dialogue with the representatives of other world religions.<sup>16</sup> While I understand and sympathize with the point here made, I still find it curious that Ignatius seems to have quite deliberately "mixed his metaphors" in this meditation. For, on the one hand, he definitely uses military imagery to establish the reality of the Kingdom of God. Christ addresses to his followers the familiar words "It is my will to conquer the whole world

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 28.

and all my enemies, and thus to enter into the glory of my Father."<sup>17</sup> But, on the other hand, as the colloquy addressed to our Lord makes clear, it is apparent that the "enemies" in question are the enemies within oneself: desire for ease and comfort, vain ambition, and overweening pride. Hence, the retreatant is asked to pray for the grace "to imitate Thee in bearing all wrongs and all abuse and all poverty, both actual and spiritual, should Thy most holy majesty deign to choose and admit me to such a state and way of life."<sup>18</sup> This is certainly not a "macho" way to conquer the world nor is Jesus a leader in the "macho" tradition. Accordingly, in thus mixing his metaphors here, Ignatius is both appealing to a traditional sense of chivalry in his followers and at the same time urging them to undergo a deeper self-examination into the underlying motives for their habitual thinking and behavior.

The corrective suggestion made in the "Foundational Issues" article is that the retreatant focus on the humanity rather than the divinity of Jesus and ask herself/himself the following questions: What are the values that controlled my commitment? What fundamental option shaped my whole life? Through what specific decisions and actions did my commitment to the Kingdom of God play itself out?<sup>19</sup> While I certainly think that these are appropriate questions to ask oneself during meditation on the life of Jesus, I also believe that one does not thereby shift attention from the divinity to the humanity of Jesus. Rather, it is precisely the divinity which is thus revealed through the humanity. The principal reason why we in the spiritual tradition of the West do not more readily grasp this fact is that we have in large part misconceived what it means to be divine. That is, we think of God in the singular as the transcendent Lord of heaven and earth to whom all creatures owe obedience and submission. Perhaps that is why, as Karl Rahner suggested some years ago, Christians have over the centuries remained "mere 'mon-

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<sup>17</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 95.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 98.

otheists.'"<sup>20</sup> That is, even though we nominally profess belief in God as triune, practically speaking, when we think of God we think of an all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth.

Within the trinitarian scheme which I have proposed above, however, the Father serves the Son and all finite subjects of experience at every moment by offering them possibilities of existence which the Father alone cannot actualize. The Son, in turn, together with all finite subjects of experience serves the Father in actualizing those same possibilities: the Son actualizes perfectly and without reserve; finite subjects of experience, only imperfectly and halfheartedly. The Spirit, finally, serves the other two members of the divine community and all succeeding generations of finite entities by facilitating this ongoing dialogue between the Father, the Son, and the world of creation. Seen within this context, the man Jesus in submitting to the promptings of the Father at every moment of his earthly life was consciously or unconsciously coordinating his human thought and action with the ongoing response of himself as the Son to the Father. Thereby his humanity was divinized and became a more perfect instrument for the revelation of what it truly means to be divine.

Whether Ignatius himself thought of the three divine persons as serving their creatures is hard to say. On the one hand, in the *Contemplation to Attain the Love of God*, Ignatius pictures God (in the singular) as "laboring for me in all the creatures of the earth."<sup>21</sup> Likewise, in the celebrated colloquy before Christ on the cross in the First Week, he urges the retreatant to ponder what he or she should do for Christ in return for what Christ has already done for him or her.<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere, however, Ignatius refers to God or to Christ in more traditional fashion as the Divine Majesty or Eternal Lord of all things.<sup>23</sup> In any case, as a master psychologist

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<sup>20</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 10.

<sup>21</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 236.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 53.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 98, 106.

Ignatius recognized that the chief obstacles to our human service of one another within the Kingdom were the desire for personal comfort and security, vain ambition, and pride in one's real or imagined accomplishments. Hence, in the Kingdom meditation and again in the meditations on the Two Standards and the Three Kinds of Humility, he urges the retreatant to ask for the grace to bear insults and wrongs and to live in spiritual or even actual poverty out of love for Christ, in imitation of the latter's own life-style. For only thus will one share in Christ's "glory," that is, at least as I would understand it, consciously participate in the selfless communitarian life of the three divine persons.

Simply to be, of course, one must participate in some fashion in this cosmic society. But the "glory" of Christ and all his followers is to share in that selfless pattern of existence with full awareness and intent. Furthermore, such an exalted ethical ideal, curiously enough, aligns Christianity with the highest aspirations of many of the other world religions. Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, for example, all strive in different ways for union with or absorption into a transcendent reality through selfless behavior, entailing practical recognition of the basic "unreality" of the empirical self with its narrow ego-centered worries and desires. Thus, properly interpreted, the Ignatian meditations on the Kingdom and the Two Standards do not impede dialogue among the world religions with respect to the nature of salvation or the deeper shared values of human life, as seemingly had been implied. Rather, these same meditations allow the retreatant to reach that deeper level of selfhood in which the empirical self willingly surrenders its autonomy to become part of an all-embracing cosmic reality.

### **The Election and Discernment of Spirits**

Two other features of the Spiritual Exercises which the author of "Foundational Issues" finds problematic are the Election, insofar as this is a decision made in conformity with God's specific will for oneself, and the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits, insofar as they are thought to illuminate God's specific will for oneself in the Election. I will treat both of these "problem areas" together, since they

address basically the same theoretical issue, namely, whether God has a specific will for each human being. The earlier essay finds it difficult to believe that this is indeed the case. Rather, as there expressed, God has a general will for human history, the realization of certain well-defined goals and values manifest in the person and message of Jesus. But the individual human being must make her or his personal choice with respect to those same goals and values. One cannot shift responsibility for one's concrete ethical choices to God on the grounds that one has "discerned" God's specific will for oneself in this situation. Likewise, this choice should be based on "objective moral and ethical reasoning" such as would be "performed by any conscientious human being in his or her given context, culture, and value system."<sup>24</sup>

Here I find myself in basic disagreement. For I believe that this line of thought inadvertently undermines much of what Ignatius himself saw as the real meaning and value of the Exercises for the retreatant and his or her spiritual guide. One need only recall Ignatius's definition of "Spiritual Exercises" in his introductory observations: "For just as taking a walk, journeying on foot, and running are bodily exercises, so we call Spiritual Exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul."<sup>25</sup> Simply from the wording of this definition, one would naturally conclude that God has a specific will for each individual and that the individual can learn what that intent of God for him or her is by making the Exercises.

Furthermore, as I see it, it is not necessary to make such a claim about the nature of divine providence in order to sustain the basic point here, namely, that human beings must take responsibility for their own decisions even after the effort to discern God's will for themselves in a given situation. For, at least within the modified

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<sup>24</sup> "Foundational Issues," 37.

<sup>25</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 1.

version of the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead which I have presented in this essay, it is possible, so to speak, to "have it both ways." One can legitimately speak of God's specific will for oneself at this point in one's life and yet assume full responsibility for the decision once it is made. For the Father, it will be remembered, does not determine in advance what the divine Son and all finite subjects of experience at that moment will decide in terms of giving shape to the world of the present moment. The Father simply offers possibilities for that decision, thus giving the Son and all finite subjects of experience the freedom to actualize whatever it is they want. The Son, of course, always conforms His decision to what the Son sees as the optimal possibility proposed by the Father. But this is certainly not the case with finite subjects of experience. As noted above, they regularly deviate from the intent of the Father for themselves and their world at this particular moment. In this way, they bring disorder and evil into the world. But their power of spontaneous self-constitution is thereby never compromised in favor of an antecedent divine plan for the salvation of the world.

Furthermore, these promptings of the Father (or divine initial aims, as Whitehead calls them) manifest themselves primarily, not through "objective moral and ethical reasoning," but in terms of feelings and desires on a precognitive level of experience. Whitehead, accordingly, for purely philosophical reasons would be profoundly in accord with Ignatius in the latter's insistence that the ideal time to make an election is when one is deeply moved, virtually impelled, by the felt presence of the Spirit of God to make one (and only one) choice.<sup>26</sup> Naturally, there is considerable danger of self-deception here. Hence, Ignatius provides for two other "times" when an election may be profitably made. But it is significant that of the two the preferred time is when one is moved more by one's feelings than by an objective line of thought. Similarly, Whitehead argues that what all finite subjects of experience, human and sub-human alike, have in common is that they receive the divine

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 175.

prompting or "initial aim" through feelings rather than images or ideas. As he comments in *Process and Reality*, "the word 'subject' means the entity constituted by the process of feeling, and including this process. The feeler [subject of experience] is the unity emergent from its own feelings."<sup>27</sup> Thus, for both Ignatius and Whitehead (albeit for different reasons), the human being as a conscious subject of experience is a creature of feeling more than a mind or ongoing process of reasoning.

This is not to deny, of course, that both Ignatius and Whitehead placed high value on the rational functions of human consciousness. Whitehead distinguishes four levels of subjective experience, the highest of which is "conscious knowledge," shared to some extent by higher-order animals and, above all, by human beings. He then adds pointedly, "The growth of reason is the increasing importance of critical judgment in the discipline of imaginative enjoyment."<sup>28</sup> Thus, rationality can and should add to human beings' enjoyment of life because it enables them to entertain a range of possibilities for decision which would be impossible for less sophisticated subjects of experience, and then to feel deeper "satisfaction" in the choice itself. But even here, obviously, the exercise of reason is itself grounded in feeling. Similarly, Ignatius from his own understanding of the spiritual life recognized the importance of objective reasoning both in making an election according to the third "time" and in assessing the results of an election according to one of the other two "times."<sup>29</sup> Likewise, the very structure of the Exercises, with the orderly sequence of points for meditation and suggested colloquies, is indicative of the preeminently rational approach of Ignatius to the spiritual life.<sup>30</sup> But in the end, on the ba-

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<sup>27</sup> Whitehead, 88 (136).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 178 (270).

<sup>29</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, nos. 178-88.

<sup>30</sup> Harvey Egan in his book *Christian Mysticism* mentions that the Exercises have been spurned by many experts on prayer as too "discursive,"  
(continued...)

sis of his own mystical experiences, he recognized that feelings rather than discursive thought patterns are a more accurate index of one's relationship to God and basic orientation in life.

### **Prayer, Action, and the Contemplation to Attain the Love of God**

In "Foundational Issues" the final point of disagreement with the classical interpretation of the Exercises has to do with the relationship between prayer and action in the life of a Jesuit, especially as this is brought to focus in the concluding meditation of the Exercises, the Contemplation to Attain the Love of God. Here, too, that essay makes many excellent points. Noting, for example, that Ignatius did not specify the amount of time to be spent each day in formal prayer, it proposes that formal prayer should provide the vision or "conscious horizon" of behavior for Jesuits in their work to promote the Kingdom of God, but that it should not become an end in itself.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, if union with God through prayer is sought for its own sake, it rapidly becomes sterile, divorced from the concrete imperatives of the Gospel message. What is absolutely important, therefore, "because in the end it determines union with God, is the kind and quality of action in the sense of practice that makes up the whole of a Jesuit life."<sup>32</sup>

While I agree in principle that prayer should be contextualized, adapted to the concrete situation of the one who is praying, I am uneasy with the implicit proposal that many Jesuits would be more efficient workers for the Kingdom if they spent less time in formal prayer. My own experience in the Society tells me that with rare exceptions Jesuits pray too little, not too much. Most of us tend to be "workaholics" who all too readily sacrifice prayer time to the

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<sup>30</sup> (...continued)

suitable only for beginners in the spiritual life. In this connection see Harvey D. Egan, S.J., *Christian Mysticism: The Future of a Tradition* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1984), 31.

<sup>31</sup> "Foundational Issues," 39-42.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 41



demands of our job, the needs of other people, or simply our own felt need for a "break" in terms of necessary sleep, recreation, and the like. In many cases, such a decision to forgo times of formal prayer is unavoidable. But each time that we give ourselves permission to skip a prayer period, we weaken the habit of prayer which, in my judgment, is so important for our spiritual well-being and apostolic efficiency.

The solution, of course, is to be a "contemplative in action," as Ignatius himself recommended. But how is that to be accomplished? I myself would suggest that, if one took seriously the metaphysical scheme proposed in these pages, it would be within one's grasp, given a basic good will and desire to be led in this direction by God. For according to this scheme the Father is present to us at every conscious moment in terms of divine promptings, inspirations to make this or that concrete decision, however trivial that decision might seem at the time. All that we have to do is listen for those promptings or inspirations. This listening for the divine word is already the most fundamental form of prayer. Moreover, one does not have to interrupt one's normal activity in order thus to listen. By definition, the divine promptings or "initial aims" are being given to guide one in those same activities, to enable one to do them better, with greater efficacy for the Kingdom of God. Certainly, some informal use of the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits is necessary in order to distinguish the different "voices" which one hears in the depths of consciousness from moment to moment. Some of those "voices" may counsel a patently self-centered form of behavior for ourselves at this particular moment. But, I would suggest, with practice one can learn to discern divine inspirations from what clearly are not.

Periods of formal prayer, of course, allow us to listen far more perceptively than would be possible in the course of a busy day. In my judgment, that is at least implicitly why Ignatius laid greater stress on the examens of conscience (or examens of consciousness, as they are now called) than upon periods of formal meditation. For, in the final analysis, prayer is not thinking but listening for the divine word and responding to it. Furthermore, examens of con-

sciousness allow us to review the decisions of the day and note the patterns of thought and action emergent out of them. Thus, even if we were too busy to do much active listening in the course of the day, the opportunity is still present in the examen at day's end. The meditation period, especially if it is located at either the beginning or the end of the day, is likewise well suited for a review of one's decisions over a day's time and a quiet listening for divine guidance and inspiration.

In brief, then, while I agree that all human action should be "theandric," characterized by a dynamic union of divine and human activity,<sup>33</sup> I believe that my own modified Whiteheadian vision of the God/world relationship provides a better theoretical framework for realizing that ideal in one's life than the scheme of "Foundational Issues" based on the philosophy of Maurice Blondel. For in my overview of things there is no radical division between prayer and work. At literally every waking moment, we experience the divine presence, although perhaps not consciously so. The whole point of formal prayer, then, is to alert one to what is already happening in most cases below the level of explicit consciousness. Then, as one gradually becomes more aware of the divine presence and activity in the activities of the day, one will be, in fact as well as in desire, a contemplative in action, one who habitually lives for God and tries to do God's will. The earlier essay clearly appealed to Jesuits to find God in the world about them, a world so much in need of reform and renewal. Without in any way denying the legitimacy and, indeed, urgency of that appeal to contemporary Jesuits, I would respectfully submit that the deeper need for Jesuits today is to recognize and accept their own limited but important role within the communitarian life of the triune God. That is, with Jesus as their role model, they should listen for and wholeheartedly respond to the inner promptings of the Father at every moment of their lives. For only in this way will they with all their fellow human

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

beings truly bring about the Kingdom of God for this moment in history.

## CONCLUDING SCIENTIFIC POSTSCRIPT

### The Finite Subject of Experience

The philosophically trained or interested reader may already have noted that I have employed in this essay the expression "finite subject of experience" in a variety of different contexts. Most of the time it has been used to designate human beings. At other times, however, I have made vague reference to subhuman subjects of experience; and in several places I have even suggested that the ultimate components of inanimate objects, such as tables and chairs, are likewise finite subjects of experience. While this was done quite deliberately to avoid entering into a technical discussion of what Whitehead terms "actual entities" or "actual occasions," now is the time to define more precisely what is meant by a finite subject of experience, how it comes into existence in virtue of an immanent or self-constituting "decision," and, finally, how groups of such finite subjects of experience coalesce so as to form what Whitehead calls "societies." Afterwards, I will explain why, in my judgment, Whitehead's system or some other event-oriented ontology similar to it may eventually prove to be crucial for a new and richer understanding of the God/world relationship.

What, then, is to be understood by the term "finite subject of experience" or, in Whiteheadian language, "actual occasion"? Put most briefly, an actual occasion is a momentary energy-event occurring below the level of direct sense perception and in some sense self-constituting. This is why it is called a "subject of experience"; for, strictly speaking, only subjects of experience are self-constituting. Yet, as a self-constituting subject of experience, it exists only for a moment. The most obvious example of such a momentary subject

of experience is what you and I upon reflection perceive as successive moments of consciousness or self-awareness. At every moment we spontaneously organize the data coming into the nerve centers of the brain from the external senses and internal organs of the body; we make a spontaneous, at best semiconscious, decision to ignore some data and to focus on other data in order to achieve the unity of conscious experience for just that moment. In the next moment, new data have been transmitted to the brain and the process of self-constitution has to be initiated all over again. Yet we feel no discontinuity or break in the flow of consciousness. These separate moments of consciousness succeed one another so fast that all we experience is the flow of consciousness, a sense of continuous self-identity.

But, you may object, human beings also make fully conscious decisions for which they hold themselves responsible. How are these fully conscious decisions linked with the semiconscious decisions constitutive of mere self-awareness? Among Whiteheadians this matter is still under discussion. But, as I see it, fully conscious decisions are invariably the result of reflecting upon a whole series of these antecedent minidecisions; this is what we call "making up our mind" on a given issue. Naturally, we do not have to abide by what we have already decided in this manner. We can change our minds, sometimes quite abruptly. But even in those cases we find ourselves acting in conscious opposition to what we had implicitly decided to do earlier.

Many reflective people would presumably concede to Whitehead that human temporal consciousness is indeed made up of such discrete self-constituting moments rapidly succeeding one another. But those same individuals might still balk at his next proposal; namely, that the energy-events constitutive of material reality in all its myriad forms are likewise momentary subjects of experience akin to moments of consciousness in human beings. Whitehead's argument, however, is quite simple. The only energy-events to which we are truly present "from the inside" and thus able to analyze in terms of their internal dynamics are successive moments of consciousness. Hence, on the presumption that all energy-events are

roughly similar in structure, our only chance for ever understanding the inner reality of the myriad number of energy-events that make up the world of nature is to analyze carefully what takes place in temporal consciousness at every moment.

What this effectively means, of course, is that our bodies are not substantial realities perduring with minor modifications over many years. Rather, the ultimate components of our bodies, like moments of consciousness, are self-constituting subjects of experience, psychic energy-events which happen and are gone in an instant. What endures to give the appearance of a body or unchanging physical organism is a field or environment shaped by ongoing sets of energy-events which basically reproduce the same structure or pattern of interrelation as their predecessors.<sup>34</sup> Our external and internal senses pick up these patterns and transmit them through the central nervous system to the brain. There the mind, as noted above, through an implicit decision from moment to moment constitutes for us the world of common-sense experience. Otherwise, we would be simply overwhelmed by the enormous number of energy-events taking place both within us and around us.

In similar fashion, through the organizing activity of the mind and the conscious decision-making capacity of the will, we are able to move from place to place and engage in other forms of bodily activity. Our psyche, in other words, operates as a highly complex subfield within the overall field of activity proper to the body. It serves the needs of the body, acting as a "switchboard" for all the myriad energy-events taking place therein. But the body as the larger field of activity likewise serves the psyche's needs in terms of locomotion and other life-sustaining or life-enhancing activities.

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<sup>34</sup> The description of Whiteheadian societies as structured fields of activity for their constituent actual occasions is, strictly speaking, my own, not Whitehead's. As I point out, however, in my forthcoming book *Society and Spirit: A New Philosophical Cosmology* and in a pair of articles to be published shortly, there is a basis for the further development of Whitehead's thought in this direction (see, e.g., Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 83-109 [127-67]).

Mutatis mutandis, these remarks also apply to other higher-order animals with a central nervous system and brain. But, for the same reason, they do not apply to lower-order animals without a central nervous system and brain, or to plants and inanimate things.

All of these other "things," accordingly, are likewise to be understood as fields of activity created and sustained by energy-events taking place within them. But, lacking a central nervous system and brain, these less well-organized fields of activity lack mobility or, in the case of inanimate things, such as tables and chairs, any of the external signs of life. Their constituent energy-events, to be sure, are also self-constituting momentary subjects of experience which exhibit some degree of spontaneity.<sup>35</sup> This is why I suggested earlier that all finite subjects of experience, even those constituting the successive moments of a subatomic "particle," are capable of a self-constituting "decision." They are able, in other words, in some limited way to respond to their environment, the structured field of activity out of which they are here and now emerging. But the net effect of their dynamic interrelatedness at any given moment is to manifest within the field very limited signs of life (as with plants) or no external signs of life at all (as with inanimate things).

Given these considerations, it is easy to see how Whitehead's philosophy should be called an event-ontology. For, strictly speaking, there are no more "bodies" in the common-sense understanding of the term. Rather, what we call "persons" and "things" are very complex fields of activity for the interrelated energy-events taking place within them. What in the end perdures are these same fields with their (relatively) unchanging structures or patterns of behavior for their constituent energy-events or "actual occasions."

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<sup>35</sup> Scientists working in the field of quantum mechanics have long recognized a basic indeterminacy in the behavior of subatomic "particles" (see, e.g., Heinz Pageis, *The Cosmic Code: Quantum Physics as the Language of Nature* [New York: Bantam Books, 1984], 67-81). Whiteheadians believe that this indeterminacy is due to the fact that the "particles" themselves are made up of successive actual occasions, momentary subjects of experience with a measure of spontaneity in their self-constitution.

But why, you may ask, make life so complicated? Why not continue to operate with a more common-sense approach to reality grounded in the conventional understanding of persons and things? From a strictly philosophical point of view, one could argue that natural scientists are at present implicitly working with a rudimentary event-ontology as the theoretical underpinning for much of their more empirical lines of research. Hence, if philosophy is to keep pace with the natural sciences, it too must begin thinking of reality in terms of an event-oriented rather than a substance-oriented ontology. Otherwise, philosophy will be increasingly dismissed by scientists as worthless for their own line of work.<sup>36</sup>

### The God/World Relationship

But, from a theological point of view, an event-ontology like the one proposed by Whitehead would seem to be very useful for re-thinking the God/world relationship in a manner satisfactory to our times. Many contemporary Christians, for example, believe that God is truly active in all of creation and above all in human history. Likewise, they believe that what we do genuinely makes a difference to God, has an impact on the way the three divine persons relate to us. But, from a theoretical point of view, how is this possible? Classical metaphysicians, with their focus on substance as the first category of being, generally have trouble with the notion of creatures existing in God and acting through the power of God. For, pushed to its logical extreme, this line of thought seems to jeopardize God's independence of the world and the world's independence of God. Likewise, neo-classical metaphysicians like Bernard Lonergan, Karl Rahner and their followers, who conceive the

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<sup>36</sup> Many scientists have already lost interest in the philosophical issues connected with their discipline and content themselves with a pragmatic "instrumentalist" approach to reality. That is, all that they profess to know are their own hypotheses and the accompanying methods of empirical verification. Reality beyond the phenomena or appearances of things is both unknown and unknowable. On this point, see Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms*, 35-37, 73.

God/world relationship in much more directly interpersonal terms, still have trouble reconciling belief in the eternal, unchanging nature of God with the de facto involvement of the three divine persons in human history. A genuine interpersonal relationship would seem to require that both parties to the dialogue be changed in virtue of the event of communication taking place between them and linking them together.

This is not to say that both traditional Thomist and neo-Thomist metaphysical schemes cannot be adjusted to accommodate to this new sense of God acting on us and our acting on God. The key advantage of an event-ontology such as I have proposed in these pages, however, is that it offers a totally new perspective from which to rethink the entire issue. In an event-ontology such as I proposed above, for example, the three divine persons, like human persons in their temporal consciousness, exist in virtue of a self-constituting decision from moment to moment. Their individual decisions are so interrelated that they constitute an enduring unitary reality, the reality of an all-comprehensive field of divine activity.<sup>37</sup> Within this unbounded field of activity, the more limited field proper to creation has to be located. As noted above, creation is centered on the Son in the Son's ongoing response to the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. But our world is still only part of the total reality of the Son; the full reality of the Son and the triune God may well embrace worlds that existed before ours came into being and worlds that will begin to exist after ours has ceased to be. Thus our world is still only a subordinate field of activity within the even-greater intentional field of activity proper to the three divine persons.

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<sup>37</sup> On this point consult Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 1:414-16. In this first volume of his projected multivolume systematic theology, Pannenberg devotes an entire chapter to a discussion of the underlying essence (*Wesen*) of the triune God and comes to the same conclusion as I do, albeit for different reasons; namely, that the divine essence is an unbounded field constituted by the ongoing relations of the three divine persons with one another.



Yet, because our creaturely field of activity is located within the divine field of activity, there can be ongoing interaction between the three divine persons and ourselves so as to give shape and consistency to the various fields which we mutually occupy. The decisions of finite entities within our world, for example, provide order and structure, first, to the various fields of activity to which they immediately belong; then, to the overall field of creation as centered on the Son; and, finally, to the all-embracing field of activity which is the divine community. Similarly, the decisions of the divine persons from moment to moment impact initially upon their own communitarian life (the divine field of activity, that is), but ultimately upon all the various subfields and their constituent actual occasions represented by creation. The notion of field, accordingly, as the ongoing context or environment both for successive moments in the life of the three divine persons and for successive generations of actual occasions within our created universe, allows for the transmission of influence from the three divine persons to their creatures and vice versa, without loss of autonomy or integrity either on the part of the divine persons or their creatures. The field, in other words, is the "place" where the three divine persons and all their creatures continually encounter one another and mutually influence one another's ongoing process of becoming.

Certainly, there are dangers here in "confusing" or merging the infinite and the finite. But there are equally grave dangers in keeping the infinite and the finite too far apart as virtually autonomous spheres of activity. In any event, shifting to an event-ontology as the basis for rethinking the traditional God/world relationship could be very stimulating and, in the end, quite rewarding. For it clearly represents a paradigm-shift in theology which, as Thomas Kuhn pointed out with respect to paradigm-shifts in the natural sciences some years ago,<sup>38</sup> almost inevitably brings about a restructuring of the entire discipline in which the paradigm-shift occurs.

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<sup>38</sup> See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 5-7, 84f.

Not all paradigm-shifts, to be sure, prove ultimately successful; but progress in the discipline seems to be contingent upon at least entertaining the possibility of such dramatic changes of direction at periodic intervals. My wager in working with the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead all these years is that the time is now ripe for such a paradigm-shift in the traditional understanding of the God/world relationship and, indeed, in Roman Catholic systematic theology as a whole.

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## SOURCES

### *Simão Rodrigues on the Folly of the Cross*

*One of Ignatius's first companions, the ardent and emotional Simão Rodrigues, was founder and provincial of the rapidly growing Society of Jesus in Portugal. Deeply impressed by the Third Degree of Humility, he urged his recruits at the scholasticate in Coimbra to reproduce the humiliating holy follies of the saints. He saw his efforts undermined by other Jesuits, particularly Francisco Estrada, one of the earliest members of the Society and a star preacher of uncertain temperament. Early in 1547 Rodrigues wrote the following heartfelt appeal to Ignatius for a letter in support of his position. Ignatius replied with the famous "Letter on Perfection" (William J. Young, S.J., "Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola" [Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959], 120-30). (Translated by Martin Palmer, S.J., from MONUMENTA HISTORICA SOCIETATIS JESU, "Epistolae Broeti, etc.," 547-53.)*

The grace and love of Christ our Lord be always in our souls. Amen.

The sovereign Wisdom, beholding things before they happen, in its great mercy thus makes provision for them, and teaches us how what is bad can be remedied and what is good made more perfect.

Some time back, after I had not been to Coimbra for a period of seven months because of the prince's continuous need of my presence, a great dispute arose among the brothers, or among the majority of them. Great as it was, many of those recently admitted were not fully aware of it, although it did cause them confusion and some unrest. My own opinion is that our Lord allowed it for the sake of a greater good and so

that more careful provision might be made for what could happen in the future.

Things are normally preserved and maintained by the same means through which they were acquired. Now our Society has a foundation: abjection and contempt of the world. It is through this folly that God our Lord has always aided it and favored it with special gifts. Take this away from us and we will be merely respectable clerics, gradually turning into canons regular.

And merely to go begging does not suffice. When a person is known to be virtuous and good, he always has more than enough and everybody wants to give him more than is sometimes good. No, what has to

happen is that they be really fools for Christ and on their own part desire to be considered such. They should desire to be despised by the world. This is the rock the Society was founded on in this kingdom and in these parts where we are all together making our pilgrimage. The good Lord chooses the foolish and the weak things of the world to confound the strong.

For these and other reasons too long to set down, and also because God our Lord inspired me to do so, I decided during a visit to Coimbra about a year and a half ago to indicate to the brothers "as in a riddle" the way they should despise the world and the sort of life they ought to lead after their studies. I taught them many austerities, and how they needed to suffer humiliation before everyone so that, readying themselves for great things, they might grow mightily in courage and seek for it if they did lack it. And I had them do certain mortifications about which I have already had a report sent to you and assume you are informed. (If you are not, I will send you them all in writing, because I have had them written down and intend to leave them as my testament; I earnestly desire that should I die among Christians they be placed with me in the grave.)

The intensity of fervor in the house surpassed anything that could be said or written. It was like seeing a shadow of the fervor which Christ gave to his apostles on the holy day of Pentecost. Conditions were such that the brothers, under this training,

thought nothing of requesting these things; and if they fell short, at least they maintained what was indispensable and held that of little account compared to what others had done. Of course, it is quite hard for the flesh to go all the way in this work, and highly conformable to its nature to quit these labors. Would to God our Lord that our superiors had a harder time damping these fervors and longings for humiliations than in persuading the men to undertake them. This leads me back to what I was originally saying.

All the brothers whom I have admitted here were like lions. Right now, by God's grace, I have a hard time restraining their fervors and coming up with reasons to keep them from being scandalized when I do not give them free rein; for I think they would do unheard-of things.

I have always found Santa Cruz and Estrada quite far from sharing this view of things. (I write you this now because I have to, not because I want to.) The result was that, even though they could see that, through my efforts and influence and the sweat of my brow, they lacked for nothing and enjoyed universal esteem and reverence, they nevertheless gradually became convinced that the house's good reputation was being lost through the brothers' doing things which the world disapproved of—despite the fact that we should desire only God's approval and be less concerned with men's, as Paul well realized when he said, "To me it is a very small thing to be

judged by man's mind, etc."

Even had my arguments been far weightier, they would have had no effect. These things are reached less by arguments than by inner experience. For example, if I say that St. Francis did this or that, our good Estrada retorts that St. Francis was a saint and acted by a special inspiration: let somebody show him another St. Francis or another divine inspiration. And since I have no answer to this—possessing neither of these two things in myself—I fall silent and say, "Unless you believe, you will not understand."

These two enjoyed great esteem in the house, one on account of his preaching and my having made much of him, the other because I had appointed him rector of the college. As a result, there was a cooling of the brothers' fervor in this matter. They began to look down on it and to desire to be altogether "spiritual." They thought it very improper to speak of mortifications, and despised what I had done. And when they made their views fully known, "there arose a great battle" in the college. Morale began to fall and the credit of Santa Cruz and Estrada to sink in an alarming fashion.

Estrada claimed that he had been with all the first fathers and with Master Ignatius, and that they did not do such mortifications. This I got by hearsay. To me personally he once said that they were doing more mortifications in Portugal than we had done there in Italy. This squares with what I have been told about

him.

Santa Cruz quoted Favre as saying that even in Castile he feared being mortified by our mortifications. Thus the mortifications ended up bringing mortification on me as well—more than on the men who were performing them. For they [Estrada and Santa Cruz] were assuring the brothers that the latter were only doing what they had been told and that I was the one who lacked judgment. To this opinion of theirs, conformable as it is to sensual nature, they had drawn some of the brothers, though not many.

As I say, this battle I speak of was only one of opinions. God our Lord conferred great strength on a large number who could think only of Christ crucified and despised. But in this way they threw my whole house into confusion and schism, and were acting like partisans. However, as I said at the beginning, not everyone was aware of this. It was something which God our Lord allowed for the sake of a great good and so that steps could be taken to prevent it in the future. When I left they quieted down considerably, and at present are peaceful. Since the house is large and has a lot of men in it, and each of them is pursuing perfection, there is plenty to do. And indeed, I have learned by experience that no less virtue is needed in keeping them than in recruiting them. If keeping them were as pleasant as recruiting them, the happiness would be so great, I doubt whether there would be any merit in it.

Things are all right now. Santa

Cruz is quite able in exterior matters and is indispensable here for business affairs, which are many, in fact more than can be imagined. I have great need for him, because he is a good man. I just do not know how this happened. Indeed, I am convinced that it is not they but the enemy who sowed this bad seed and that God permitted it so that provision might be made. I think it is all right now.

Nevertheless, in order to confirm this state of affairs and make it permanent, I believe that, should God our Lord so inspire you, it would be good to have a letter from you personally. The letter should not mention anyone by name but seem to stem from your wish to say what you think about the mortifications that have been performed. You should not criticize Santa Cruz or Estrada, for they are both indispensable to us; and, as long as they are under someone they respect, there is little danger here; since my influence here is greater, the men look not so much to them as to what I think and approve.

I have put in a different rector, Luis Gonçalves, the one who was in Valencia. He is quite qualified and well grounded in the institute and purpose of the Society. He has a fine reputation both inside and outside the house—indeed, had it before he came to the house. I doubt either Hercules or Isidore will be able to give a full account of these details.

I have taken Estrada along with me to do some preaching at court; he does that well. I am not sending him

off. You should know, first of all, that he is not suited to be on his own or in charge of people. His nature is of a simplicity and temperament that is not at all edifying to people who do not know him. In addition, his health is weak; unless he is given special treatment, he will die. Moreover, having the character he does and lacking any visible austerity, he will accomplish nothing. Certainly I doubt much good could come from his going off to Castile in this state. If he argues back against me sometimes, imagine how he will be with others who were not among the first fathers.

In saying that he argues back against me, I refer to at least two points on which I have never been able to change his mind. First, the matter of these mortifications: he wants mortifications that will never offend anybody. The second is his continually pestering me for permission to go and visit his mother. No arguments can dissuade him; namely, that it is more perfect not to be concerned with such things, both in order to give good example to the members of the Society and to avoid the numerous untoward consequences that would ensue: a man ends up under obligation to all his family and all their friends, petitioning kings and princes on their behalf, which is something loathsome. There are other reasons as well, over and above the example of the saints.

Of all the men I have admitted, there are practically none who would not prefer never to see their families again. If I give way on this point and

allow one man to go comfort his mother for his father's death, the relatives of all the rest will ask for the same, and men will be going off in all directions. Santa Cruz has been asking me for the same thing. I had already denied him permission before, since no one who wishes to serve Christ should remember any carnal obligation.

Father mine, I would love to see you and talk over many things with you. In our Society we all have to be either saints or devils. This vocation is very high, and God our Lord makes me feel a great esteem for it. I am eager to die a thousand deaths and suffer a thousand crosses for it, should God grant me so great a

grace. I would rather be a member of the Society than king or pope. This brings me enormous joy, and I have greater happiness in serving as cook in the Society than in being tutor and confessor to the prince (which is here considered a great thing indeed).

The paper ends here, and so will I. For the reasons mentioned above, I have said nothing to Estrada, and did not send him right away to Castile, but will wait for your reply. He is doing good work here without risk, helping out with his sermons.

Master Simão

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor:

I am grateful to Joseph Tetlow, S.J., for his study, "The Fundamentum: Creation in the Principle and Foundation," in *Studies* (September 1989). Though not a scholar I think my reaction to the study may perhaps represent the opinions of other Jesuits. I wish to comment on two points only, leaving weightier matters to competent authorities.

The study distinguishes God's "project" as an ongoing activity requiring improvisation and adjustment from its initiation. This action, I think, was distinguished in traditional terms as Creation and Providence, with God the sole source of both without aid of angels or demiurge.

Father Tetlow says the "project" begins with creation from chaos; the biblical "from nothing" is a kind of non-idea. Chaos, says the author, suggests a philosophical and recent scientific idea. However, in any language *chaos* means "any disorderly mass in a state of utter confusion"; that certainly indicates some things

already existing. Creation *ex nihilo* means just what it says: nothing pre-existing; the inception and continuity depend wholly and solely on the divine will and intelligence.

Secondly, I think the author misrepresents our understanding of our founder. True it is, as Father Dalmas writes, that the Saint used his baptismal name Iñigo until his studies in Paris, and thereafter adopted Ignatius. But to see a change in character from "his eyes glinting in glee, with Basque temper, a change of mind, a great friend," to a "forbidding personality, icily chaste, preoccupied with obedience, endowed with iron-will self-control" is a distortion of a noble character.

Perhaps Father Tetlow was so instructed by a novice director of that persuasion; my class at Milford was more fortunate in having Father William Young introduce us to the true Ignatius.

John J. Barrett, S.J.  
Brooklyn, New York

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